

No Way Is the Grass Greener

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Category: Buffy: The Vampire Slayer

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 1999-04-25 09:00:00

Updated: 1999-04-25 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 09:34:58

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 6,682

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Buffy, Willow and Cordelia suffers a life-changing (not to mention body-altering) experience.

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Note: Just one of my takes on why Cordelia would go away with Angel. This may also be the beginning of other stories. Feedback would be appreciated.

Prologue

--"anyway, I left immediately, cause, y'know, I didn't want to prolong the moment. I mean, i-it's better this way, right?" Buffy Summers sighed. "It's just so hard."

"Sure, Buffy. A-And of course i-it's gonna be hard, cause h-he's like, always been your smoochie factory," Willow frowned remembering. "E-except for that time when, when he went... bad. But--"

"He makes nice smoochies." the Slayer agreed.

"Where's Xander?"

"Ah. Cordelia." Buffy said turning to the newcomer. "And for what purpose do you want him?"

"Like it's any of your business." Cordelia snapped. Then rolled her eyes as Buffy and Willow just looked at her. "I wanted to give him back something he left at my place. Satisfied?"

"Oh." Buffy shrugged. "He was supposed to meet us here."

"Well, when he gets here tell him to... nevermind, I'll come by." she said, starting to walk off.

Suddenly all the lights in the club went off. Screams errupted everywhere, Cordelia's being the loudest. Willow squeaked beside the Slayer, while Buffy herself jumped to her feet.

"Willow stay here." she said touching her friend on the arm reassuringly.

"Buffy." said a frightened voice from just beyond them. "Buffy, what's going on. I can't see anything."

"The lights went off, Cor." explained the Slayer. Then kindly, she continued as she walked around Willow without losing physical contact. "Walk back a few steps Cordy. Try reaching for my hand." When Cordelia reached her and grabbed her outstretched hand, she bade the other girl sit down. "Both of you stay here, I'm going to check what's going on, alright?"

Before Buffy could walk away, however, a shooting pain hit her right on her forehead. She gasped out loud, not realising that the other two next to her did the same. For a few moments, she could only sway on her feet, trying to fight off the throbbing pain in her head.

When her head cleared to allow coherent thoughts, Buffy realised she was sitting down, holding onto a hand, slightly smaller than her own.

"Buffy?" Willow gasped, pain coloring her voice.

"I-It's okay Will, I--" Buffy stopped.

"Ohhh. B-Buffy..."

Then the lights blinked back on. There were relieved sighs, and then hundreds of shuffling feet as people decided to get out of the place quickly. When something like this happened, the Bronze regulars knew better than to hang around.

The trio sitting at their usual table, however, did not move an inch. They stared at each other, with horrified looks on their faces.

"Cordelia. I don't know why you'd want to hang around this place... or with this people... but you said you were gonna drive us home. Well, we want to go now and there is no way I'm walking in these shoes. I just bought them." Harmony's voice broke into the silence.

"Oh, my gosh!" Cordelia exclaimed, turning to Harmony. "I'm in pain here, not to mention... s-something else you won't believe, anyway... a-and all you can think about is your... shoes!"

Harmony glares at Willow. "I don't care about your pain, loser." Turning impatiently to Cordelia, she exclaims, "Are you driving us or what?"

Buffy stared right back at Harmony, a confused look on her face. "O-Or... what?"

"Fine! That's it. I knew, hanging around this... this... Well, I knew it was gonna rub off on you eventually. I can't believe it!" at that, the blonde girl stalks off angrily, muttering all the way how she'd guessed it all along.

"W-What's going on? S-Someone, please explain." Cordelia tearfully asked. Looking at the slight girl standing next to her and the dark-haired one sitting on the opposite chair. Still gazing at the latter, she suddenly burst out crying, her head buried in her hands.

"Will, are you there?" the Slayer asked.

"I-I'm here Buffy." she was answered. "W-What's h-happening?"

Buffy stood and almost fell. Righting herself, she grimly turned to the blonde girl standing in front of her. "I don't know, but we're gonna find out. Let's go."

Part One

[note: W is Cordelia. C is Buffy. B is Willow.]

They stood in front of Cordelia's car. The three looked at each other.

"Give me that." Willow snaps.

Cordelia quickly gives her handbag to the red-haired girl. Buffy nervously looks around. Willow turns off the alarm and walks around to the driver's side. Buffy quickly reaches for the door handle, and pulls. The handle comes flying off.

"Oh." she gasped.

"Easy there, Will." Cordelia, standing behind her whispered quietly, a little amused.

When everyone was settled inside, Willow in the newly adjusted driver's seat, Cordelia next to her and Buffy at the back, they made haste to Giles' apartment, it being a 'quiet' Sunday night. No one said a word.

At Giles', Cordelia hammered at the door. "Giles! Open up! Giles!"

Buffy winced. The noise was loud enough to wake the...um, yeah. Willow paced furiously.

The door was thrown open. "W-What in the heav-- Cordelia! I-Is everything all right? Where's Buf-- Buffy!"

"Giles." a relieved look settled on Cordelia's face. "You're here."

Giles frowned as the girl stalked past him and into his apartment. He turned to the Slayer questioningly, but she was prevented from saying anything.

"You have to do something! I'd better be back in my own body before

the morning, or I swear..." Cordelia came back from inside and grabbed Willow.

"Explanations inside. I have to sit down." she glared at the red-haired girl, as she dragged her inside. "What kind of shoes are you wearing! It pinches!"

"My gawd! What is everyone's deal with shoes tonight! I am in Willow's body, for pete's sake! Isn't that an issue enough?!"

"Hey!" when everybody turned to look at her, Buffy blushed and continued hastily. "T-There isn't anything w-wrong with, with, um, my body. I eat healthy."

Giles' eyes went very round. He suddenly made a choking noise as an idea of what happened, dawned on him. Turning to Cordelia, he hesitantly asked. "B-Buffy?"

"Giles?" she answered softly. "You'd better sit down and tell us what's happening. O-Or when we can make it go away."

Giles automatically went to sit down on the other end of the couch. He gestured for the two to sit as well. "Wait. Why don't *you* tell me w-what happened first. T-Then we'll see about, um, a-a solution."

"Willow and I were waiting for Xander at our usual table at the Bronze. Cordelia came by looking to insult Xander--"

"Hey! I was not!"

--and then the lights went off. Everybody panicked. I was going to check what happened, but this headache--"

"Y-You got it too?"

"Yeah... Did you have it too, Will? Cordy?"

"Horrible. I thought my head was gonna open up and spit out my brains."

[note: Cordelia in W's body. Buffy in C's body. Willow in B's body.]

"Eww." Buffy gave Cordy a startled look, then continued with her explanation. "When it went away, or most of it, Willow cried out. So, I was going to tell her everything was fine, 'cept, my voice... I-It was Cordelia's."

"Then w-we drove here. I-In Cordelia's car. W-With four doors and three handles..."

"Will..." Buffy turned to the girl with her body. She was amazed to see that although it was her face, the expression could still be described as typically Willow's.

"Well, I-I'm really sorry."

"What is she babbling on about?" Cordelia asked.

Willow sank deeper into Giles' comfortable chair. Buffy spoke to her Watcher instead. "Giles. Willow is in my body..."

"Good gods!" Giles jumped to his feet. Looking agitatedly at Buffy and Willow. "Sh-She has all your... But she doesn't know how... What if there's... I'm sure there's no i-impending prophecy we need to face. B-But I must make sure. This is not good, Buffy..."

"Duh! Look. Just do something. Change us back. I mean, there's gotta be something in those big books you keep, right?" Cordelia wanted to know, also getting up.

Giles looked at her to Buffy to Willow. "Ah, well, of course, t-there might be a..." he sighed. "I must go to the library then. But, it will take some time."

"How much?" this from the Slayer.

"W-Well, ah... Little time, perhaps. But, not before tomorrow." Cordelia wailed. Giles blinked at the extraordinary sight of Willow's face crunching up and...

"Fine. Tomorrow, we'll all meet in the library. We're all going to work on this." Cordelia's voice had the strength that was usually in Buffy's voice.

Willow nodded. When Cordelia looked as though she was going to complain again, she quickly tried to reassure the girl. "You shouldn't worry. I-It's not as if anybody's going to notice you, Cor. You're in my body afterall."

"That's my whole point! Not to mention, she's in mine. She wouldn't have a clue in how to be me! She's going to make me into an outcast, a-a loser... just like her!" Cordelia exclaimed, gesturing in Buffy's direction.

"Hey, I resent that." Buffy scowled. After a small pause, she continued in a bitchy voice. "And for your information, pretending to be a ditz is extremely doable! Even 'losers' can do it." the Slayer turned around, making her way out of Giles' apartment. A second later she was back. "I'm going home. Question is, whose home?"

Part Two

[note: Cordelia in W's body. Buffy in C's body. Willow in B's body.]

Early the next day, Buffy, Willow and Cordelia walked into the library eagerly. The three had slept at Buffy's place, much to Cordelia's dismay. This morning they had driven early to her place just so she could get Buffy to change into the 'appropriate' clothes befitting Sunnydale High's reigning bitch queen.

"Just don't look too much, okay?"

"Oh, please, Cordelia..." Buffy rolled her eyes. Willow on the other hand, went bright red. Buffy sighed, and patted her friend comfortingly. They were in for much embarrassing times. "At least we didn't switch bodies with any of the guys."

After Cordelia's, they then quickly made a stop over at Willow's house. Cordelia at first refused any of the other girl's clothes, but eventually, she managed to mix and match. In the end, Willow looked strangely familiar, but different all the same. "Gosh! Am I actually expected to be as smart as you too?" Cordelia wondered, as Willow handed her a heavy bag full of books.

"Giles, tell us you have good news, so we can mentally kiss you and love you forever." Buffy told her Watcher.

"Oh. Ah. Well. T-There is some mention here o-of a, well..."

"Nothing, huh?" Willow asked, switching the computer on. Giles blinked at this. "Maybe there'll be something on the net..."

Buffy went over to perch on the borrowing counter. Although she managed to jump up and on it on the first try, she had to use more force and energy. Cordelia slumped at the large table, arms crossed dejectedly.

"P-Perhaps, er, Willow."

For fifteen minutes, Giles regaled them with the accounts of people from one book or another, who had heard of a similar experience. Not once, however, did he mention a solution. A spell that could stop or unwork whatever magic was plaguing the three.

"Where were you guys last night?" the door opened and in walked Xander. "I thought I was gonna get bit, waiting for you people to show."

"Hey Xander." Buffy said from the counter.

"Oh. You." turning to the others and ignoring what to him was Cordelia, he continued. "Did I mention nobody was there? The whole place was empty." a grin appeared. "I had fun with the espresso machine."

"Making froth is harder than expected." Oz commented, also walking in. He moved quietly towards the person he thought was Willow and, before anyone could say anything, leaned over to kiss her. Pulling up with a surprised look on his face, Oz looked closer at his girlfriend. "Willow?"

"Y-Yes?" Buffy seemed to answer. Oz looked in the direction where she was sitting, in front of the computer. "H-Hi."

"Willow."

Xander seemed to realize too that it was the Slayer in front of the computer and Willow slumped at the table. "Oh. Does this have anything to do with that Ethan guy again?"

"Ethan?" Buffy jumped down from her counter perch and strode over to Xander. "Where did you see Ethan?"

"And you care because?" Xander asked acidly.

"Because she's me, Xander." the girl sitting in front of the computer said quietly.

"And I'm her." Cordelia added, gesturing toward Willow.

"Woah! Back up! Everybody, please, let's try to make sense for little old Xander here. Giles?"

"T-There seems to have b-been a little, er, well... I-It seems that someone had cast a-a spell that managed to entrap Buffy's soul i-in Cordelia's and Cordelia's in Willows and--"

"Willow's soul is in Buffy's body?!" Xander exclaimed. "N-Not that there's anything wrong with your body, Will. But--"

"Oh, yeah. We know what you feel about her body." Cordelia snapped. Then she stood up and walked out of the library. Xander frowned.

Willow, turning a deep red, jumped up and ran after her. Buffy sighed. "Great going, Xand. Oz, maybe you could go rescue those two, before they do something..."

"Sure." Oz replied coldly looking at Xander. "Just, just don't switch with anybody else, right?"

"I'll try." she watched as the orange-haired boy walked out of the library. "Xander, y'should know better than talk about bodies, in the sexual context, and Willow, in the same sentence. Especially when Cordy and Oz are in the room."

"Ethan?" Giles prodded the boy's memory. "What about Ethan?"

"Oh, h-he was hanging around the Bronze when Oz and I left."

"You said the place was empty?"

"He was outside. Actually, now that I think of it, he was coming out of the back door of the building next to that alley near the Bronze. He sort of looked at us, then he quickly walked off. Oz and I went to look for Willow and you. Where did you go?"

"We went to Giles."

"Oh." he said looking at Buffy. "This is really... strange. Are you sure you're not Cordelia?"

* * * * Oz found Willow outside, searching in vain for a glimpse of her body.

"Nothing?"

"Uh-uh." Willow shook her head, nervously tucking a strand of blonde hair behind an ear. "D-Do you think she's okay? Xander can be such a--"

"Jerk?"

"W-Well... sometimes. A-And he also says things he doesn't mean... sometimes."

"Willow... "

"Summers. Why aren't you in class?"

Willow jumped startled. "Oh! Me? Oh. Yeah, me. M-Mr Snyder."

"Well?"

"Um, b-because it hasn't started?" Willow answered, voice lowering fearfully. "I-I'm on my way though. Right, Oz?"

"You'd better not be up to something, brat. Just remember, give me one reason..."

"O-Of course not, Mr Snyder. Um. W-We're just gonna go now." then Willow yanked Oz off his feet and into the school.

"Willow!" Buffy called out, seeing them as she rounded the corner.

"Buffy!" Willow cried hurrying to the Slayer's side.

"Um, Will? Y-You better let your boyfriend go, or he may never play in a band again." Buffy quietly said.

"Huh? Oh! Oz. I-I'm so sorry. Buffy's a-a strong girl, b-being the--"

"Yup! I'm a strapping young woman, or rather you are, but really we need not discuss that here and now." lowering her voice, the Slayer gestured to the library. "Where's Cordelia?"

"Cordelia! What *is* your deal?!" Harmony exclaimed. "You broke off with that loser months ago, but you still hang around them so much."

Out of nowhere, Cordelia, in Willow's guise, appeared. "Lay off, Harmony! You spend just as much time complaining about who I'm--"

"You again! Who in hell do you think you are--"

"Enough!" Buffy yelled. Everyone jumped and turned to her. Buffy swallowed and gave Willow a small apologetic smile. She then faced Harmony with one raised eyebrow. "If you must know, I'm just trying to get some information about that history test you people had last Friday from geek girl here. Afterall, it's not as if *you* can help." pausing for effect, she continued. "Do you have a problem with that?"

Harmony paled, then turned bright red at the insult. "Well, y-you shoulda just said. A-Anyways, we were just wondering if you could make it to Alice's tonight..."

Buffy began to walk off, behaving very much like Sunnydale High's Most Popular Girl. Harmony, and the other girls with her, followed as one. All were hanging on Buffy's every word and action.

"Um, s-she's good."

"She'd better not be too good." muttered Cordelia. "And how did she know I missed history last Friday?"

Part Three

[note: Cordelia in W's body. Buffy in C's body. Willow in B's body.]

"So, um, h-how was your day?"

"Familiarly strange." Xander immediately answered, giving the librarian a wide smile. "People just had no idea. It was fun."

"Well, so glad you enjoyed yourself, Harris!" Cordelia exclaimed. "Do you know how many times people tried to trip me today? And those... those stupid jocks kept on knocking my books off my arms every single time they saw me. And they were everywhere! Then some moron with pink hair actually pushed me up against a locker, threatening to kill me unless I gave her my lunch! Did I miss it? Is it Pick-On-Cordelia time of the week?"

"Hey. T-That's pretty normal. A-At least no one tried to lock you in the boy's toilet, this time." Willow shrugged. "Besides, they don't know you're Cordelia. T-They think you're Willow."

"Yes! They think *I* am Cordelia." Buffy shook her head and threw her arms in the air. Turning to the real thing, she frowned. "How do you stand it? How can you sit there all day, listening to Harmony or Aura, or whatever her name is, talk about... hairclips! A-And they actually expect me to have an opinion on whether fuchsia is better on white than magenta?!" Buffy rubbed her head. "Then in Math, that hammering outside the window just drove me crazy. What are they doing, anyway?"

"Graduation stage." Oz supplied.

"Yeah. Snyder decided to have it outside this year. Maybe he thinks, with the heat, not many people will come." Willow agreed.

"Or everybody will leave early." smirked Xander.

"How was your day, Will?" Buffy asked her friend, slightly concerned. Cordelia's face looking concerned for someone other than herself, was a revelation. Willow blinked several times before answering her friend.

"Um, at first i-it was okay, e-except for the part where I broke five test tubes and started bleeding everywhere. Mr Finkle," Willow smiled mischievously as she related her story. "He took me to the nurse. He looked a little green for a minute, and, um, I think that's the only reason he came with me. I-It wasn't really bad. The cuts, I mean. When we got to the clinic, they had pretty much healed up. That was really cool. Except I had to think quickly about an excuse." tucking a strand of hair behind an ear, she looked down at her hand. "Then it turned bad when Mr Snyder appeared. He, um, didn't believe me. He said I was just trying to get o-out of class. Which wasn't true 'cause... I happen to like Chemistry! Anyway, he gave me a detention.

I've never been to detention!"

"Well, for as long as you stay in my body, and Snyder in his, that little room upstairs is pretty much gonna be like a second home away from home. Well... fourth, if you count the cemetery and this library. Anyway, sorry, it's just one of my life's littler hells."

"Oh, what are the others?" Willow asked fearfully. "Um, I-I shouldn't even bother asking, huh?"

Buffy walked over to her friend and gave her a comforting hug. Cordelia looked a little left out, so Oz automatically reached over and gave her arm a squeeze. Startled at the contact, Cordy jumped. Then seeing it was only Oz, she gave him Willow's best smile. Xander went over to Buffy and Willow, eagerly waiting for an invite into the hug.

Giles, blinked bemusedly at the teens before clearing his throat. "Right. Well, I-I am rather sorry you've all had such a horrible, horrible day, b-but we really must get on with what we have to do."

"The spell! Did you find anything to undo it?" questioned Cordelia.

"Um, no. Not, not really. B-But I was hoping you will all... Well, I have collated most of the books that should have something on this, er, sort of thing." Giles gestured at the three.

"Great! Books. Again." sarcasm dripped from Xander's voice.

"I'll check the net." Willow makes her way to the computer. "Maybe someone had answered my posts."

"Ah, W-Willow?" Giles hesitantly called the computer hacker.

"Yes?" blonde head turned preoccupiedly.

"Well, I-I was rather hoping you'd... come and train."

"Train?" Buffy's brows met at Willow's confusion. Then she paled as the implications of what Giles meant, registered. "Oh. Train. 'Cause... broken car-door handles, and five test tubes a-and... Vampires!"

"Woooooow, watch out! Will, sit down. Giles did you have to do that?" Xander scowled at the Watcher as Willow swayed as though she would faint. "Couldn't you have said it more slowly?!"

Buffy also looked frightened. She stared at her friend. "Giles...?"

"You, in Cordelia's body, are no match for the vampires around us, Buffy. However much you know instinctively how to fight." Giles firmly explained. He tried to hide his own fears for the soul that was now trapped in his Slayer's body. "Willow must learn how to fight. It is imperative. A-And for her sake, she also must learn how to control *your* body." the Watcher turned to Willow. "We cannot have you b-breaking things all the time. O-Of course, this may all be

unnecessary, but..."

"Better safe than sorry, keeps the G-man from having a worry."

"Er, yes, o-of course... Xander." Giles pulled his glasses off and stared at the wall behind the dark-haired boy. Ten seconds later, he continued. "We can, of course, refrain from going out tonight. I-In fact, I think it would be most, um, prudent to stay indoors, in view of our situation."

* * * * * "Oooh! I-I'm sorry!" Willow looked contritely at Giles. "I didn't mean to hit that, um, hard."

Cordelia smirked from the table. "Geez, no wonder he never let us watch when Buffy was training."

Giles glared at their audience. "Hmp. It simply has n-nothing to do with that. There just wasn't any n-need for you all to distract her when she already had that loud noise she called music, to contend with." Sitting with her feet casually resting on the table, Buffy rolled her eyes. As Giles walked towards his office, he gestured for Willow to join her friends. "T-That should suffice for today, er, Willow."

"Cool." Willow cocked her head at Buffy. "I-I'm not even tired, Buffy!"

"Keep your ground Slayer girl, you haven't met any vamps yet." Cordelia arched her brows at Willow.

"Oh." the child-like wonder left Willow's face as she strode over to the table and slumped dejectedly on one of the chairs. "I'm never gonna be as g-good as you, Buffy."

Xander gave Cordelia a furious glare. "You might be in her body, but there's definitely no doubt who you are."

Buffy, ignoring the two, gave Willow a confident smile. "Of course you're gonna be a great Slayer, Will. Afterall, I couldn't have possibly defeated all those demons and monsters without you. You were the brain, and now you get to have the brawn as well. And you've got Xander and Cordelia and Oz. And I'll be here too, although, I really don't like reading much. A-And Giles. He's never far."

As if on cue, Giles walked out of his office. "Buffy--"

At Giles' voice, Buffy gave a little start making her chair tip backwards. As she crashed onto the floor, the whole room fell silent. Then Cordelia squealed (in Willow's voice). "You! What are you doing to my body?! Buffy, my gawd, you'd better not bruise or, or cut or break anything in there, or I swear you'll regret--"

"Ow! Too late--"

"Buffy! Are you okay?"

"Pain! Pain!"

"Oh gosh, this reminds me of that time you lost your Slayer powers..."

"Everyone! Settle down." Giles belowed. "Buffy. Are you hurt? Seriously?"

Buffy was yanked off the floor by Willow. She rubbed her elbow and the back of her head before answering Giles in a tiny voice. "Yes. But not. Very."

The librarian gave her a dark look. "You really should know better than to rock back on your chair thus. Cordelia is right, i-it's dangerous. While you're in each other's b-bodies, you must make sure not to let any harm come to it. Each of your lives may depend on it."

"Buffy..." Cordelia warned the 'ex'-Slayer inhabiting her body.

"Okay, okay... Besides, if you hadn't come out of nowhere, Angel-like, I wouldn't have--" Buffy froze in mid sentence.

"Huh. What's up?" Xander leaned over and snapped his fingers in front of his friend's face. "He-llooo."

--Angel!"

"Oh. Him." Xander sagged back against his chair.

Willow's eyes grew round. "Ah, Buffy, we have to tell him. I-I can't pretend..."

"Yes, t-that's what I came out to ask." Giles cleared his throat. "H-How about your mother? Your parents? Surely, they will realise something's amiss?"

"What did I miss?" Oz inquired as he walked in.

Part Four

Joyce Summers paced worriedly behind the sofa. Every now and then she would peek at the television screen and the woman reporting the late night news. Sunnydale was having a relatively 'quiet' week. There had been no bodies presenting extreme blood loss found, and only a couple of persons were reported missing. Joyce was nervous because, having just arrived from an art buying expedition in LA, she had found the house a mess, and her daughter absent. Not that that was unusual for Buffy, of course. But if it had been fairly slow...

Squealing tires, followed by yelling and the slamming of doors, made Ms Summers rush to the window. She saw her daughter standing next to Oz, as Cordelia and Xander got out of the former's car. From the driver's side Willow jumps out, angrily yelling at Cordelia. Joyce frowned. Willow: angry and yelling?

Buffy's mother hurriedly rushed back from the window. She turned off the television and pretended to settle down and read an art magazine instead.

She heard the sound of keys scraping against the lock. Composing a calm and relaxed expression on her face, she waited expectantly for her only child. The door opened.

"... saying, you're the one who made such a big deal about not bruising your-- Hi, mo-- Uh." Buffy (in C's body) froze on the threshold of her house.

"Cordelia!" Joyce exclaimed, startled inspite of herself. "Where's Buffy? Oh. There you are honey. Where have--"

"Um, m-mom? I-I think we should, uh, w-wait for G-Giles." Willow (in B's body) said nervously from just outside the door. "H-He should be here a-any moment n-now."

Cordelia (in W's body) rolled her eyes. She flounced in, and sat herself in front of Buffy's mother. "Can't we just get this over and done with. Boy! When is he going to get a new car?! Oh, Ms Summers, I've had the worst day ever."

* * * * * "Oh, my... But, i-it's going to be alright, right? This isn't permanent? R-Rupert, tell me my daughter is... This is just too much, I don't think--"

Buffy's mother had been calm as the group explained the situation to her. The calm, however, was starting to slip. Her eyes were panicked and frightenend.

"Mom, please? Everything is gonna be fine. I swear it." Buffy took hold of her mother's hand in reassurance. "Giles is doing everything he can. A-And so are we."

"I'm sorry, Ms Summers." Willow whispered, feeling irrationally guilty at being in the body of the woman's daughter.

"Oh, Willow. It's not your fault, sweetheart. I just..." Joyce trailed off, looking at the three girls alternately. She then sighed, obviously trying to pull herself together. "This Ethan person. Where is he now?"

"We've got reason to believe he's left town." uncomfortably, Giles stood up to pace.

"Yeah. Will and I went to check by some of the places he's stayed in previously. No sign."

Willow, sounding reassuring, smiled at the group. "I'll check later if the rental car under the name 'Ethan Rome' has been returned. If so, then it'd mean he was back in LA."

"Ethan Rome?" Xander scoffed. "Yeah. Great alias! Who does he think he's messing with?"

"Giles, what if he's the only one who can undo this little spell?" Buffy asked concernedly. Avoiding her mother's eyes, she stared instead at her Watcher. "I don't mean to sound pessimistic here, but after all the research we've done so far, I'm not exactly drowning in feelings of success and triumph. I mean, at this point, I'd settle for 'we're getting somewhere, yay!' But nothing of that, either."

"I agree and oh... We're just letting him get away!" Cordelia wailed. "Buffy. Do something! I want my body."

"Eww." Buffy made a face. "Sorry. Bad visuals there for a moment."

Giles cleared his throat. "Um, well, t-there is that possibility of course. But, let's not think about..."

"Giles, I think it'd be best, for everyone, to deal with the worst-case scenario now."

"That would mean the Slayer has to go look for Ethan, a-and then bring him back here, right? A-And since I am i-in your body, Buffy, that would be me. Right?" trying to look brave, Willow looked towards Buffy and Giles.

Giles stopped pacing. Buffy frowned. "No!" Xander exclaimed. "You're not going anywhere, Will. You're not really the Slayer. And even if you were now, you're not exactly experienced. Giles! Tell her."

Giles brows furrowed deeper. He took off his glasses and blinked several times. Buffy shook her head as well. "Xander is right, Willow. You can't go. Besides, it's probably the whole point of this *exercise*." she said grimly. "Someone wants the Slayer out of town, so said someone can do evil here in little ol' Sunnydale."

"So, who's going?" Oz asked.

Buffy turned to her mother. Joyce, realizing the meaning of Buffy's gaze, went pale. "No..."

* * * * * "Mom. I'm sorry, but I have to."

"Buffy, no." Giles moved forward to stand next to his young charge. "There must be another way and we'll find it. It's dangerous for you to go out there on your own. You must remember you don't have the strength, y-you can't call on the powers you're so used to. No, Buffy. Your very life will be at risk."

"Not to mention *my* body."

Xander glared at Cordelia. "Shut up, Cordy."

"You can talk. You're not the one trapped in another person's... Huh." Cordelia turned towards the rest of the group. "Besides, there's still school. I have to have my graduation pictures. My Grandmother's expecting it." At everyone's confused look, Cordelia rolled her eyes and continued. "If you all must know, it's her that's paying for my schooling. If she's not happy, what do you think will happen to me?"

"I know a place where you can get grad pictures." Oz supplied helpfully.

"I think this is all quite, er, valid. But we've only done a day and a half of, um, research. P'haps, something will come up. Buffy, shall we just live it here for now? Please? What you are proposing is gravely dangerous--"

"Ooh. Giles is punning."

Cordelia smirked at her ex. "Shut up, Xander."

--And we must all think of the consequences. I'm sure another day won't be too terrible."

Reluctantly, Buffy shrugged. Joyce seemed to be relieved. "Mr Giles is right, Buffy. L-Let's think things over first, shall we?"

"Fine, but it'll be harder and harder to find him. Ethan Rome or not, he's not entirely stupid."

"Then I'll go back to the library. Willow, come with me, if you please?"

"More training?" the red-haired girl asked eagerly.

Part Five

[note: Cordelia in W's body. Buffy in C's body. Willow in B's body.]

Three days of vacillation, tears and promises of being careful, the decision was made.

"I can't believe I'm letting you do this."

"Cordy, the quicker I leave and look for him, the sooner I'll be back *with* him. Then maybe we'll all be normal before College starts."

"Smile." the photographer ordered. He took the picture before Buffy could arrange her features, then nodded boredly. "That's it."

"No! Wait! Wait. You're not serious?!"

"The prints along with the negatives will be sent to you when they're done." the man told Cordelia. "Cash or credit?"

Changing her tone of voice to Willow's sweetest, and adding a charmingly innocent smile, Cordelia begged the photographer for another shot. Hesitating for a moment, the photographer eventually shrugged and gestured for Buffy to take the pose again.

"Smile properly this time." hissed Cordelia.

* * * * * "How'd it go?" asked Willow, as Buffy, Cordelia and Oz walked in.

"Huh! Miss Pushy here drove the photographer wild. Wouldn't be surprised if the pictures turn out horrible."

"Don't even say that. Besides, you're the one whose elbows kept sticking out."

"They're your elbows Cordy, and it's not my fault you're all arms and legs, too." Buffy scowled. "Tall people..."

"Hey..."

"Buffy, you're back."

"Hello, Giles." Buffy turned away from Cordelia. "Any new news that are in the category 'good'?"

"Er, no. N-Not really. Um, your mother called. Perhaps you might want to ring her back. She's at the gallery."

"Cool. Know what it's about?"

"Um, no. No."

As Buffy went to talk to her mother, Giles moved to peer over Willow's shoulder at the computer. Beyond them, Oz pulled a chair for Cordelia, who gave him a grateful, if surprised, smile in turn.

* * * * * "Is everything okay, Buffy?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. Mom just wanted to tell me that she'd spoken to Dad about my arrival in LA. He'll apparently be waiting for me at the bus station. Hey, Xander."

The boy paused in opening a Twinkie to give her a friendly smile.
"What's up, Buff?"

"Y-Your mother told your father?" Giles asked, slightly disapproving.

"No. I meant, he's expecting Cordelia, Buffy's friend." Buffy shrugged weary shoulders. "It was the only way I could get Mom to agree. Either that, or have her come with me. At least Dad might be cool with it. I mean, he can't go over protective since I'm not his daughter, right?"

"Just gotta make sure not to make any slips." Xander warned.

"I know. It's gonna be way hard."

"Does he know Angel is coming?" Willow asked innocently.

"Eww." Cordelia sat up straight, her face going a little pink.

"What?" Buffy raised an eyebrow.

"As cute as he is, you better not use my body to give Angel a happy."

"Cordelia what are you... Oh." Xander grinned.

The silence was broken by Willow's whisper. "Giles, what does the curse say about this?"

"Um, I think it all depends on Angel."

"How?" Buffy wondered out loud.

"On whether he loves you for your body alone... hmmm." Xander turned to Willow who squirmed a little. "Or, ah, your soul. Am I right, or am I right, G-man?" Xander asked the flustered librarian.

"But what happens if he loves both?" Oz's question brought another silent pause.

"Buffy? Don't even try to find out. Ewww." Cordelia warned the non-Slayer.

* * * * * At the Bronze that night, the Scooby gang gathered to unwind from the stresses of the last few days. It also served as a good-bye gathering for Buffy and Angel who would be leaving the next night.

"Angel. T-Thanks for coming with me."

"You know I'll do anything for you, Buff."

"It's going to be hard. For me, especially."

"I know." he whispered.

"At least you can be distracted by the fact that I look and sound like Cordelia. You on the other hand..." Buffy ducked her head.

"It doesn't make a difference, Buffy. I can't even tell anymore."

"What do you mean you can't tell? Are you saying you're starting to feel all a-buzz over Cordelia?" the 'ex'-Slayer squeaked.

"Buffy, you know that's not what I meant!"

"Well it had better not. Because there's definitely a 'no touch' clause coming with this package." interrupted Cordelia as she came up behind Buffy. "Not unless *I'm* in it, of course."

"Go away, Cordelia." Xander made shooing motions with his hands. "You're not wanted here."

"Xander!" Willow exclaimed admonishingly. Xander looked unrepentant.

"Maybe we should go dance." calmly, Oz suggested.

"Who me?" Cordelia asked.

"Well, technically you are half wolf-boy's girlfriend." Xander smirked.

Oz glared coldly at Xander before taking Cordelia's hand firmly and leading her to the dance floor. Willow stared dejectedly after them. "Hey, Wil. Why don't you and me dance."

"'I', Xander."

"Huh?"

"Nevermind."

"C'mon." Xander turned to Angel and Buffy. "You two dancing, too?"

The other couple looked at each other. Buffy looked ready to continue their conversation. Angel quickly got up and pulled her after Xander and Willow.

A few minutes later, Spike walked in. Lurking in the shadows, he spied on the group dancing obliviously to the slow music. Puzzled, he walked closer. Nothing new with the two red-heads, but since when did Angel start nuzzling up to the shallow cheerleader. And the Slayer, right behind them too, with that loud-mouthed friend of hers.

"Interesting..." he muttered to himself.

FINI (for now)

End
file.